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## COMMUNICATION

### Grain Standardization

The AMERICAN ECONOMIC REVIEW for June, 1921, contains a short article on *Grain Standardization*, part of a paper read at Atlantic City, December 29, 1920, by Mr. H. Bruce Price. There is one aspect of grain standardization that this does not examine though it may have been covered in a part of the paper that was not published. In a general way there is a presumption that the grain that is graded as of the highest quality according to the standards of inspection is really the best suited for economic use. Now this is not necessarily true. Wheat that may have all the external appearances of being of the first quality may yet be lacking in the vitality that will make it actually a first-class milling commodity. The subtle influences of climate and soil composition may give the kernel hardness, color, fullness, weight—in short, may endow it with all the appearances that would commonly be taken as the *indicia* of quality. Yet quality may be lacking. Nor is this peculiar. A moment's reflection will remind one that the finest looking apple of a particular variety may not equal in its distinctive excellencies a less handsome specimen of the same variety grown under different conditions. Wheat offers a parallel illustration.

The significance of this fact has been revealed in the laboratories that are becoming a recognized adjunct of the larger milling establishments. The great milling companies are finding it pays them to have made a careful analysis of the wheat that comes from different districts of a supply territory, in order to guide more successfully their buying policy. In certain mills by carefully compiled card-index systems kept through a number of years these companies are able to form very definite conclusions as to the actual quality of wheat grown in certain districts, no matter what official grade may be placed upon it. The result is that grain from some districts sells at a premium, even though its technical grade would not appear to warrant it. Buyers are sent into this territory or the cars are "spotted" in the railway yards at inspection centers and selected for purchase. On the other hand carloads from other districts are given a wide berth. They are sold on their official grading but they pass on to the export market or go to mills less alert or less scientific in the management of their business.

The wider aspects of this economic classification working beneath the official system open up problems too fundamental to be dealt with in a short note, however worthy they may be of consideration. (1) As yet I do not think there is any ground for complacency as to the efficiency of the methods of grain standardization. The system is too crude, is necessarily rough and ready, and does not get close enough to the essential value-creating element in the grain. (2) If in any really large degree the

milling companies are combing the officially graded supplies and selecting therefrom the best for their own mills, what about the quality of grain that is exported from the American continent? Must not its repute suffer? Parenthetically, I may add that I am not in a position to estimate the extensiveness of the practice. There is no doubt that it takes place. (3) How far are official standards reflected in the value of wheat lands? Values in certain districts rest largely upon the ability of the soil to produce year after year wheat of the first quality according to official classification. Yet this particular wheat may be lacking in the best qualities for which it is intended to be used. Factitious values in wheat lands may be created by imperfect methods of classification.

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